

## Religion Trail Follow-Up

Following our discussion on the Religious Mysteries trail, I sent through some of our unresolved questions to Naomi at the Melbourne Buddhist Centre. Her answers are below. My questions are in *italics*.

**From:** naomi kallista overton [nomze@yahoo.com]

**Sent:** Thursday, 23 June 2011 1:16 PM

**To:** Mccaw, Christopher T

**Cc:** MBC Office

**Subject:** Re: Fwd: RE: Proposal: Visit from University High School Students Wednesday June 15th

Hi there Chris,

Great to hear that the visit to MBC inspired lots of questions and thought for your students.

*Chris: In particular, students were interested in imagining how life would be if you were constantly aware of the impermanence of things. How would we feel about our parents, or our iPhones, if we were always thinking about how they would not be around forever? They were worried that this might lead us to not care for things which was interesting.*

**Naomi:** That is interesting to hear that they worried recognising the impermanent nature of all things would lead to caring less. Interesting, because often understanding impermanence can have the opposite impact - caring more because you recognise what you love won't last forever, and to enjoy it/them while it lasts.

*Chris: Students had the impression that Guatama Buddha was the only person to achieve full enlightenment. Could you confirm for us whether this is what is accepted in Buddhism - or is it thought that many people have achieved full enlightenment?*

**Naomi:** With regards to their first question, Gotama is not thought to be the only human being to achieve enlightenment, and it is thought that others before him achieved enlightenment but did not decide to teach. In fact, the Buddha took some time to decide that he would in fact teach what he learnt, as he didn't think people would understand. Perhaps they would just think he was mad! It may well be possible that there are other enlightened beings walking the earth even today - perhaps they are quietly teaching in their communities without necessarily needing to advertise the fact they have achieved enlightenment.

*Chris: Following from the idea that only one person has ever achieved this state - How do we know that the Buddha wasn't simply a madman who had a lovely hallucination? Since we can never directly see into the mind of another, especially another who lived 2500 years ago, how can we have any certainty about what is said by the Buddha? The students commented that if someone started saying the same things today, they would probably be dismissed as misguided or mentally ill!*

**Naomi:** In relation to the student's second question, that's absolutely right, we don't know. The Buddha provided the 8 fold path and instructed his followers to 'try it for themselves', as opposed to blindly following. So as Buddhists, we put meditation, living ethically, and studying into action - and then see what impact it has on our lives. Observing fruits of practice can increase confidence in what the Buddha said, which could also be considered 'faith'. Of course, faith is also required to commit to practicing the path in the first place!

I hope this helps,

Kind Regards,  
Naomi